

Copyright

by

Jiyue Li

2013

The Report committee for Jiyue Li
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

Chinese Students' Conundrum of Cheating

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor: _____

Russell G. Todd

Supervisor: _____

Iris Chyi

Chinese Students' Conundrum of Cheating

by

Jiyue Li , B.S.; B.A.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of the University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2013

Chinese Students' Conundrum of Cheating

by

Jiyue Li, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

SUUPERVISOR: Russell G. Todd, Iris Chyi

Abstract: This article mainly talks about how Chinese students are seeking different ways to get into American universities. Because of the large number of applicants, the competition is intense. Some students are trying something different to get their documents look great, such as changing transcripts, fake recommendation letters and non-existing experiences in the resumes. In addition, there are actual consulting and servicing agencies in China helping students apply to American colleges with partially fake material. In the U.S., these type of modifications are called cheating, but with a bigger picture that considering the cultural and societal differences between China and the U.S., we are able to find several reasons that why this phenomenon is happening and expanding; meanwhile, what possible steps can the American colleges do to solve or reduce the cheating trend in China.

Table of Contents

Text	1-21
Reference	22

During a five-minute break between GRE classes at the Chengdu New Oriental School in Chengdu, China, study abroad hopeful Wenrui Shuai glanced at an appealing advertisement. It offered students success in applying to highly ranked U.S. colleges by generating important application materials, including recommendation letters and a personal statement. Though Shuai had studied for the GRE for two months to get into a graduate program in biology at an American college, he was still concerned about whether he was ready and fretted over his application materials. Even so, he hesitated before contacting the agency.

"If there is an easier way to go, why should I not take it and save myself some time and energy?" Shuai asked in an interview.

Shuai, 23, graduated in June 2011 with an undergraduate biology degree from a university in Chengdu. Because of pressure from his parents, he decided to apply to an American master's program. During his five-month internship as a research assistant in a pharmaceutical company in Chengdu, he took the GRE class. Feeling internal and external pressures, Shuai said he felt he needed strong supporting materials to make his master's application impeccable, even if some of the materials were falsified.

"I have done two internships, in Chengdu and Shanghai, already," Shuai said. "But I won't be able to find a job. I believe a master's degree will help me get hired."

So did his parents. Shuai comes from a middle-class family and said his mother and father wanted him, their only child, to earn a master's degree from in America, hoping it would enable Shuai to be more competitive in China's job market. His plan was to get accepted by a university in California or Utah, where he wants to continue his biology studies. After receiving his master's degree, he plans to go back to China and start his career. If he didn't do well on his first try at the GRE, he planned to take it again, he said.

Shuai said he felt he was not yet qualified to study at a U.S. college, which was the case with many Chinese students who had already gone to America. He added that the more important aspect of studying abroad was experience rather than progression. He said that because he felt he wouldn't get into a highly ranked U.S. school, the experience of another culture and schooling system would be the main benefits.

Shuai said plenty of students are already cheating on applications in China, which means that those who do not cheat are at an unfair disadvantage.

"I would not feel that bad if I break the rules, because there is a trend of doing that in China," he said.

Shuai's opinion is widely shared in China, where cheating on college applications is regarded as an effective way to be admitted to U.S. colleges. Like Shuai, large numbers of Chinese students are seeking consulting and service agencies to help them apply to American universities.

"I know more than 50 percent of students in my current analytical writing class have inquired in those consulting services agencies," said Wei Gao, an English teacher from Chengdu New Oriental School. Wei has been teaching the GRE analytical writing class for seven years, and she said consulting services for study abroad have become increasingly popular in recent years.

According to the report based on a recent, 250-student survey by Zinch China, the Beijing branch of the California-based Zinch education consultancy, found that college application fraud among Chinese students is prevalent. The survey indicated that roughly 90 percent of recommendation letters to foreign colleges were faked, 70 percent of college essays were ghostwritten, and 50 percent of high school transcripts were falsified.

The system works like this: A student comes to a consultant like Chengdu-based Chengdu Huaying Consulting & Service Corp. to get help applying to a U.S. school. The agency helps the student prepare supporting documents such as recommendation letters and college transcripts. If some documents are not strong enough, the agency will generate fake materials. The Zinch study showed agencies receive \$6,000 to \$15,000 from each student for such services.

Chengdu Huaying is one of the largest agencies in the study abroad business in Western China. According to its website, the corporation was founded in 1992 and it is an accredited consultancy for overseas study and migration, approved by China Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Security. For the past 20 years, Huaying has assisted more than 20,000 Chinese students who were accepted at foreign universities.

Other agencies in Chengdu, such as Qi De Consulting & Service Corp., are charging students by the number of universities to which they apply. Da Lai, 45, an independent businessman, said he paid about \$ 6,500 in total for his son's applications to six overseas universities.

In Lai's view, American universities have a more mature education system that does not evaluate students based on only GPAs, which are the vital factor in gaining admission to Chinese universities. Lai said his son will have a better experience if he studies in the U.S. and that is the most important reason that he said yes when the agent ask him if he agreed to cheating on application materials.

"His future life will be better only if he goes to a better school," Lai said. "And we will do our best to make him go to an American university. We will choose cheating if we need to."

According to Henghua, another education consultant in China, since 2010 some American universities require a third party to certify transcripts from Chinese students because of the increase in cheating on applications. As a result, Henghua's report said, large numbers of Chinese students will only be accepted by lower-ranked U.S. schools that are undergoing financial difficulties.

"The cheating in China is chaotic," said Ruoxing Sun, a senior in computer science at the University of Texas at Austin. He added that he has been in America for six years and receives phone calls occasionally from students with questions about studying in the U.S.

"Most questions came from my friends' parents," Sun said. "They are really concerned about their children's future since China is growing fast and the society will be more competitive."

Most Chinese parents in middle-class families have been through the National College Entrance Examination, which is a tough and torturous experience. They believe it is a necessary to ensure their children gain a competitive advantage by studying in the U.S. and, as a result, be better prepared for the competitiveness of Chinese society. Many parents decide their children have the right to cheat on their applications, since they have heard from agents that many students are successfully using fake documents.

"My parents have a strong sense that a master's degree from an American university will help me in my future career," Shuai said. "They think it is very difficult to compete with others if I do not have experience overseas."

Shuai is from a middle-class family, and his parents can afford the full tuition at an American institution. Although his parents believe the education of an American college will help Shuai build up his strength and skills, neither of his parents has been

to the U.S. "Most of the information they received was from someone else, such as their friends and colleagues," Shuai added.

Shuai's parents are not alone in China. Su Zhang, another parent from Chengdu, believes that a degree from an American university will help her child to find a job in China. "I don't think he can find a good job in China with a Chinese university's degree since the competition is fierce," Zhang said. "I heard a lot of companies value overseas degrees more than Chinese degrees. That's why I want to send my son to the U.S."

Zhang's son is a high school senior in Chengdu Shishi High School. With relatively poor grades at school, Zhang thinks her son should go to an American university after graduating to have a better chance of improving his academic performance.

"My mom wants to send me to an American university, even if I need to cheat on my applications," Zhang's son, Hao Li, said. According to Zhang, her son has little chance of acceptance at a Chinese university. "His teacher suggested applying to an American university, which has a bigger chance to get accepted and earn a degree," Zhang added.

At 48, Zhang has been working at the city of Chengdu's People's Political Consultative Conference (the local government) for 16 years. Her annual income is about \$35,000. Zhang's husband has his own business, and his average annual income is about \$40,000. "If we send our son to the U.S., we will need to plan an annual expense of at least \$40,000 for him," Zhang said. "But if he could finish his study in the U.S. and earn a degree, we think it's worth it."

This kind of reasoning is part of the reason Chinese students are becoming an important part of American universities' student population. According to the annual Open Doors Report from the U.S.-based Institute of International Education, in 2011

the number of Chinese students in U.S. colleges had increased by 23 percent from 2010 to 157,000, which is the largest group of foreign students coming to the U.S.--22 percent of all international students. Those numbers are helping drive the need to submit applications with impressive supporting materials.

"These numbers did not surprise me," said Huaiyin Li, a member of the admission committee in the UT-Austin history department. "From what I heard, the idea of cheating on applications seems normal in China." Li said that many Chinese high school seniors chose to study abroad to avoid the annual nationwide college entrance examination, whose Chinese name is Gao Kao.

Another Chinese parent, Jie Liu, has a similar opinion. Liu is an accountant at the Board of Transportation Planning in Sichuan province. She believes her daughter will have a better performance and more progression in the American education system. "My daughter does not have good grades in her high school, so her teacher suggested to apply to an American university," Liu said. "Because with her current grades, she won't get a good grade of the Gao Kao and won't be able to go to a good university in China. It will be a better chance for her to apply to a university in the U.S."

American educators often are not aware of the booming cheating trend in China. Emanuel Tutuc, an associate professor in the department of electrical engineering at UT-Austin, said he can't tell whether application documents are real or not.

"When I review the transcripts from a Chinese student, I would never think of whether the transcripts were fake," Tutuc said. "I don't think I can recognize the difference." Tutuc has been on the graduate admission committee of the department since 2008. He reviews hundreds of applications from Chinese students each year.

"I have heard anecdotes about Chinese students trying to make fake material to apply to American schools," Tutuc said. "But I don't understand how this could be possible

to make fake transcripts." Tutuc is from France and earned his M.S. and Ph.D. from Princeton University. As a former international student in the U.S., Tutuc said cheating on applications will never be acceptable, despite his understanding of the pressure on international students. "Cheating is absolutely not right. I would never consider a student who cheated on his application," Tutuc added.

Tutuc said he doesn't have a solution to the cheating trend among Chinese students. "Sometimes students from other American universities come to our department to talk to faculties to determine if they are interested in their major field of research," Tutuc said. "In that case, we can know more about the student based on the discussion, but not only the application."

Since interviews are voluntary, only a few students talk to faculty when they apply to UT Austin.

"We get to know most of the applicants by reviewing their applications and other material," Tutuc said. "Since we have hundreds of applicants each year, we are not able to interview each of them individually."

According to Tutuc, the fundamental way to solve the problem of cheating on applications is to solve the root of the problem, which is in China.

"It is still hard to believe that so many people are actually trying to cheat," Tutuc said. "I think Chinese universities and high schools should have a better control with their official transcripts and make them really difficult to fake."

A Chinese parent of a high school student, Su Zhang has a different view of cheating. Based on the goal of sending her son to study in the U.S., Zhang said she was willing to try a variety of methods, which include cheating, to ensure her son's admission.

"I don't think this is real cheating. In China, everyone is trying to make their resumes look good by exaggerating some experiences and achievements," Zhang said. "Since a lot of people have unreal things in their resumes and other documents, if you don't make changes, you can't survive in such social competitions."

According to Zhang, an agent from a consulting and service corporation told her that they made some changes in her son's application documents. "They said it is more like an artistic process instead of real cheating," Zhang said. "I paid them a large amount of money, and they will try to get my son accepted by an American university."

Neither Zhang nor her husband has been to the U.S. Their information and impressions about the American universities were all from agents. Zhang said an agent took care of the process and necessary documents for application. The only thing Zhang's son needed to do was take the SAT and TOEFL (Test Of English as a Foreign Language). To ensure an admission to a U.S. college for her son, Zhang paid a good price to the agent.

"I told them to apply as many universities as we need so that we have a better chance to get accepted," Zhang said. "I paid about \$13,000 to have them do the work. I agree with cheating on some paper works since I have been told many people are doing that." Based on her son's high school grades, which were not high, Zhang said she doesn't care much about the school ranking and living expenses.

"My husband and I just hope he can earn a degree from an American university. That is all. I don't have a high expectation that he could be accepted by high-ranked schools since we all know his grades are not good enough," Zhang added.

Zhang's son is currently studying in a consulting center called Guang Ya, which is associated with Chengdu No.7 Middle School. She said the high school will give students who are in Guang Ya fake transcripts whose grades are higher than their real

grades. Zhang said there are about 200 students studying in Guang Ya each year and most of them paid a high price since they can have the official fake transcripts.

"The figures on cheating in China are surprising. I never knew that cheating on applications is so common in China," said Mary Eberlein, a senior lecturer in the department of computer science at UT-Austin. Eberlein has been teaching undergraduate classes in the department for 11 years and said about 20 percent of her students are from China, despite Austin being more than 6,000 miles away from China. Eberlein said many educators in the U.S. colleges would be shocked to hear the numbers of Chinese students cheating.

Gao Kao is the most important exam in a Chinese student's life. High school seniors take the exam on June 6 and 7 every year. It is the only standard for the institutes of higher education in China except art schools. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, in 2011 more than 9.3 million high school students took the examination, with about 6.7 million students being accepted by nearly 2,000 universities. About 2.6 million high school graduates did not go to Chinese universities. Some went to foreign universities, but others could not enter colleges due to low exam scores.

"The competition is really intense," said Lihua Zhang, associate director of the office of student affairs at Chongqing Nankai High School. Zhang, who teaches senior-level English classes, has been teaching at Nankai High School since 2001.

"We have about 100 students in total who did not take the college entrance exam during the past five years. They all applied for study abroad or universities in Hong Kong," Zhang said. According to Zhang, around 1,200 students each year graduate from Nankai.

Nankai has been one of Chongqing's top high schools for more than a decade. The school consistently achieves high graduation rates and average scores in the annual

college entrance exam. As a result, enrolled students in Nankai experience significant pressure from their teachers, their parents, and they also put pressure on themselves.

"The college entrance exam is somehow risky for everybody," said Tianyang Li, a 17-year-old senior at Nankai said. "If I did not do well on the exam, the study of 14 hours daily over two years means nothing. All my expenses mean nothing." He added he has considered for a long time applying to a U.S. school because he cannot risk his future on one exam.

Li said Nankai had more than 1,300 seniors graduate the summer of 2012, and he is not the only student thinking about studying abroad instead of taking the Gao Kao. According to Gaokao, a website that provides news about the college entrance exam, in 2011 about 740,000 Chinese high school students did not attend the college entrance exam, but chose to study abroad.

One reason for this was the huge work load required to prepare for the exam. Many seniors in top high schools such as Nankai have to take classes for about 10 hours every weekday, and take extra assigned homework. Li said that as a result, he averaged six hours sleep each weekday.

Li said he wants to major in electronic engineering or civil engineering. He will apply for universities in California and Michigan. After receiving his bachelor's degree, he plans to continue his graduate study in the U.S. and find a job there after graduating.

"My parents are very supportive with my choice of applying to overseas universities," Li said. "Foreign universities will make the decision based on all kinds of materials other than just one exam."

China's growth in recent years has been accompanied by a rapidly expanding middle class. They can afford paying full tuition and are willing to pay the cost to send

children to the U.S., where parents think the higher education system is more complete and mature than in China.

"I may not even be able to find a job after graduating if I go to a Chinese university," Li said, "because the number of graduating students each year (in China) is huge and it makes the society really competitive."

Besides pressures from parents, Chinese students also face the pressure from the reality of modern Chinese society. China is the world's most populous nation, and its demographics, along with its fast-paced economic growth, make it a highly competitive society. According to the World Bank, China's gross domestic product has grown 10.2 times between 1990 and 2010, and as a result, many Chinese are feeling pressure and an unprecedented sense of crisis for their careers.

"The fast-growing economics are accompanied with the increasing of commodity price in China," said Xing Liu, an economist from Chongqing, China. Liu said that China's economic growth gives more opportunities and options of working; it has been narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas.

"Right now the children from the middle-class families are competing with children from the rural areas," Liu said. "The rural kids usually have better grades, are willing to work hard and can do well in Gao Kao, which gives the urban students a lot of pressure."

While dean of the Business College at Chongqing University, Liu, 53, has been researching the economic gap between China's urban and rural areas for more than 25 years; he thinks that Chinese urban residents are facing unprecedented pressure that prompts them to send their children to the U.S. "because they think their children will face less pressure than in China."

"I went to the U.S. in 1993 to study for my Ph.D. Every time I went back home, my families and friends were telling me about their living pressures." Huaiyin Li said. Li said the talk tended to focus on inflation, increasing workloads and low income increases.

According to the 2011 annual report from the Chinese Ministry of Education, the number of college graduate students was 5.3 million, and more than 210,000 students chose to study abroad to get their master's degree. Based on a report from People.com.cn, the website of People's Daily, the primary official newspaper of the China's Community Party, the influx of so many graduates, both from Chinese universities and foreign universities, even if a graduate can find a job, the average initial monthly salary is only about \$430.

"The average salary is just enough to cover the living expenses in a city like Chengdu," said Di Luo, a senior majoring in marketing at Sichuan University. "I believe a master's degree from an American university will definitely help me to find a good-paying job."

At the end of June 2012 Luo will graduate from Sichuan University, which is highly ranked by Chinese ranking services. Her plan is to study marketing in a U.S. school. After studying the GRE for a month, she decided to talk to a study-abroad service agency.

"The lowest price I need to pay is about \$6,000," Luo said. "But they guaranteed me I will be accepted by a university in the U.S." Luo added the agency's most popular deal is called one-package service, which means you only need to study for the qualification tests such as GRE or GMAT, and the agency will take care of the rest of the application process.

"They can also help me select and contact the universities, write recommendation

letters and a personal statement," Luo said. "But the price will be higher--\$10,000 to \$15,000."

Luo considered three agencies in Chengdu and chose Huaying. She said she doesn't care too much about school ranking and living expenses. "It just has to be in America. Huaying told me they can ensure an admission from a U.S. college, but it might have a low ranking," Luo said. "And honesty, it doesn't matter."

"We cannot guarantee our clients will receive admission with a scholarship," said Royce Luo, a consulting executive in Huaying. "But, actually, all of our Ph.D. applicants received scholarships in all kinds of ways." Luo added that some Ph.D. applicants received graduate assistantships, while others received scholarships based on their applications and undergraduate universities.

Many Chinese students are facing the same difficulties as Luo when applying to U.S. colleges. Phoebe Song, a Chinese student who didn't want give her full name or her university's name, said she took the TOEFL test nine times to get a qualifying score. Song is currently majoring in business at a university in Ohio, which an agency selected and helped her get admitted into. Her family paid the agency \$10,000, and she felt the money is worth it.

"I think the TOEFL test score is one thing the agency cannot forge," Song said, "because the school required the official score report directly from the ETS [Education Testing Service]." Song didn't pass the language test for international students provided by the university after registration. She said she took nothing but language classes in her first semester. At 25, Song has not taken one class in her major and, according to the program description at her U.S. school, it takes an average of two years to earn a master's degree.

"I feel very anxious but I can do nothing. I cannot cheat on my real abilities," she said.

According to Huaiyin Li, the professor from the UT-Austin history department, forging documents is an important way for academic placement agencies to help their clients get accepted. Many agencies have an array of document templates for recommendation letters and personal statements. Li said agencies hire professional English writers to use those the templates to write recommendation letters and personal statements for students.

"Since most of the students are high school seniors and are not familiar with the application process," Li said, "they and their parents will let the agency to do the whole application process for them." Li pointed out there is a meeting of interests: While parents want their children to receive a good education, students want an overseas degree to enable them to be more competitive in the Chinese job market, and the agencies want to make money.

"Under those circumstances," Li said, "cheating seems a high-risk, but high-return, solution for most students and their parents."

Meanwhile, Tutuc, the graduate admission committee member at UT-Austin's electronic engineering department, said he thought cheating would soon be recognized by all American universities if the trend continues. As a result, he said, American administrators will more stringently review every piece of documentation from Chinese students.

"I am surprised that actually cheating is so well-organized in China," Tutuc said. "But I don't think cheating is a good solution for Chinese students."

Luo said she would not feel good if she cheated on applications and got admitted. "But my parents will be mad at me if I don't continue my graduate study in the U.S.," she added.

It is not surprising that Chinese parents are driving the trend of cheating on the application process due to the context of China's modern history. Most Chinese parents are in their 40s and 50s. When they were young, they directly experienced the twists and turns of China's Cultural Revolution, which overturned many traditional rules that dominated Chinese society. During their teenage time, they heard the late premier, Deng Xiaoping, encouraging them to focus on getting rich after the Cultural Revolution stopped China's economic growth for 10 years. After more than three decades of extraordinary growth in China, they have witnessed many people who succeeded by bending the rules.

Their children have inherited a confusing view about being honest. The Zinch China report said students were "simply doing what they were told by their parents."

"The traditional Chinese, throughout the history of thousands of years, share a common sense called family essential," Li said. "They work hard, earn good salaries, and they all want to contribute to the family, especially their children."

When the current Chinese middle-aged parents graduated from high school, more than half of them didn't go to college. Their only choice was to put extraordinary effort into their careers in order to be successful. Now, with their children facing similarly important choices when graduating from high school, these parents don't want their children to repeat the difficulties they went through during the social changes brought about by the Cultural Revolution. Sending their children to the U.S. presents the best and most effective option in their opinions for ensuring career success.

"If my son gets accepted by a U.S. college, I will sale ... real estate to ensure our family can have enough money to support his studying abroad expenses," another Chinese parent, Jie Yue, said. According to Yue, her son made the decision of studying abroad himself, which Yue and her husband support. Because they are happy to see

their son make such important decision, Yue and her husband decided to make every effort to support their son, which means paying full tuition and living expenses.

“We plan to take at least two-thirds of our total deposits from the bank to make sure his spending, and we all think it’s worth it,” Yue said. “There is an old saying in China, which is, no matter how tough the child is not suffering, no matter how poor not poor education.”

As one of the survivors of the early Gao Kao after modern China’s Reform and Opening Policy, Yue entered college in 1982. Yue said at least half of the students in her high school class didn’t go to college due to low grades on the Gao Kao.

“I don’t want my son to take the same path as I did 30 years ago,” Yue said. “If he failed in the Gao Kao, there’s a large chance that he won’t be success in his life.”

Since most Americans are not familiar with the tortuous part of modern China's history, it is understandably hard to understand the cultural and historical context that influences Chinese parents to condone cheating. The Zinch China's report pointed out differences between Chinese and American parents. From an American point of view, the Chinese parents are over-involved with their children. But from the Chinese perspective, the report stated, American parents are irresponsible with their children. The cultural norm in China is to consider a 17-year-old not yet capable of managing a decision as important as college education. Since parents are pushing their children to apply for the U.S. colleges without any personal experience, they are calling the agencies for help.

"The idea of family essential makes the parents willing to spend a big amount of money on their children's education," Huaiyin Li said. "Those agents want to make big money out of that, but cheating seems the easiest way to guarantee their clients a spot in a high ranked American university." Li added that a big part of cheating occurs

for high school graduates looking to undertake undergraduate study. Since all high school seniors in China study the same courses, cheating on their application documents is easier, because most recommendation letters appear the same, Li said.

Since recommendation letters need to be signed by an individual, usually a teacher, agents often write letters for students and teachers or school administrators, who then sign their names.

"My professor directly signed the recommendation letter and gave it back to me really quickly," Song said. "I don't think he actually read through the whole letter."

As a member of the admission committee in the history department and an associate professor at UT-Austin, Li reviews hundreds of applications each year. He said at least 30 percent of them are from mainland China. When he reviews some application documents, he said he can tell some of the recommendation letters weren't written by college professors.

"I cannot say they are fake letters because the signature is true," Li said. "But the writing looks sloppy, and some of the terms are not correct."

Li said recognizing falsified documents and selecting the right students has gradually become an issue in recent years, with applications from China increasing.

The U.S. emphasizes academic credibility. When students hand in their applications and documents, reviewers tend to accept them as genuine, and if they find something wrong, will normally grant applicants the benefit of the doubt. As a result, many students can still get accepted by American colleges while submitting fake materials.

"That is why many students are still cheating on applications while it is risky," said Xueqin Jiang, a columnist at the Chronicle of Higher Education. "Because the

probability that Americans will find out is really low."

As an educator with experience in the education systems of both China and the U.S., Jiang said that understanding the personal thinking of Chinese students will help U.S. colleges select the right students and mitigate the cheating trend.

Jiang pointed out the most basic difference between Chinese students and American students is their ability to think autonomously about an issue. In his article "Selecting the right Chinese students," published in the Chronicle, he said: "The toughest question you can ask a Chinese student is also the easiest you can ask an American: What do you think?"

Many Chinese students are not able to effectively think for themselves because their parents and teachers simply drive them to follow orders, Jiang said. China's education alienates students from one another, from the world in which they live, and eventually from themselves. Because they aren't able to construct a self-narrative, Chinese students may live comfortably in their bubble, but have problems overcoming new challenges, he added.

"A Chinese education does not prepare most students to study abroad," Jiang said.

Jiang suggested an interview containing questions that can test empathy, imagination, and resilience, as opposed to only considering prospective students exam scores and supporting documents, would help American universities select the right Chinese students.

Although American colleges need to consider how to avoid cheating from Chinese students, cheating isn't limited to Chinese students.

"American students often cheat on exams," said Kilian Ashely, a junior majoring in

biology at UT-Austin. "But I have never heard anyone cheating on college applications." Ashley said he believes Americans are severe on academic cheating.

"Any students caught with fake transcripts should be expelled from school immediately," Ashley added.

But not everyone understands the concern about cheating, especially when the outcome is successful.

"In my opinion, even if some Chinese students cheated on their applications, they still became top students in their majors after they started classes in the U.S.," said Andy, a Chinese student from Arizona State University who didn't want to give his full name because he didn't want other people to know he used faked documents in his applications.

Andy is currently a Ph.D. student in the electronic engineering department. At 27, he has been in the U.S. for three years. Andy wants to find a job in the U.S. after he completes his Ph.D. "I feel good when I study in this university," Andy said. "This is a very nice country to live."

Andy admitted he changed his undergraduate transcript before he applied to American universities. His parents had a connection with officers in the dean's office at the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, where Andy earned his bachelor's degree. Staff from the office helped change his final transcript when he graduated.

"I do not think what I did was cheating," Andy said. "I did change my transcript, but it is still an official transcript with signature and seal on it. It's not fake."

While American universities seem slow in coming to appreciate the scope of the

problem, allegations of Chinese students fudging applications is hardly news in China anymore. Cheating scandals rarely emerge in China due to the large enrollment numbers of students. Due to cultural differences, the import of cheating is not the same in China as it is in the U.S., meaning large numbers of Chinese students like Andy continue pushing the boundaries of what compromises cheating.

“Academic cheating used to be big scandals in China, but recent years people are getting used to it because there are so many cheating scandals,” senior professor at Chongqing University Hu Si said. “Copying and pasting other people’s research papers is not news among universities. That is the reason why many universities in China are using plagiarism detector on students’ research papers to avoid cheating.”

Si has been teaching at Chongqing University for 28 years. She has been to two American universities to complete her research in financial aid dynamics. While being involved with both China and America’s academic atmosphere, Si said the definition of cheating in the two countries is not the same.

“In China, for instance, if we have certain connections with people in the dean’s office, we might be able to change the transcripts. It will still be the official transcripts, but it has been changed,” Si said. “In China, changing transcripts through the official way is not considered as cheating, but in the U.S. colleges, changing the official transcripts is something people can never imagine.”

Si said the main difference of the definition of cheating between China and the U.S. is that “some under-the-table deals and black-box operation behaviors are not considered as cheating in China, but in the U.S. they are.” According to Si, since so many people are trying to seek all kinds of ways to change their grades and add fake experience to their resumes, “this kind of behavior is gradually accepted by many people now. They know it’s not right, but since any people are doing it, if they don’t, they are having disadvantages,” Si added. “And one important outcome is that the

boundaries of cheating are being pushed continuously.”

"Although I changed my transcript to make my GPA higher," said Andy, the Arizona student, "I am still one of the top students in my department--I deserved the admission."

Andy's example illustrates the alternate sides of the issue for potential U.S. college applicants like Luo, Tianyang Li, and Shuai. From a short-term perspective, cheating is risky, but not risky enough to overcome the temptation to try. From a long-term perspective, the cheating phenomenon will obscure the process of application to many Chinese students, including the ones who do not cheat.

According to the report from Henghua, once more and more American universities start to realize the cheating facts in China, Chinese students will gradually lost their credibility. As a result, it will be become harder for general all Chinese students to apply to U.S. colleges. In the long run, more Chinese students will only be able to go to lower ranked universities that have financial problems and need the tuition from them. Under that circumstance, the quality of studying abroad may eventually begin to fall.

"Chinese students should realize the consequences of cheating in America," Huaiyin Li said. "The pressure they have is huge, but it should turn into a positive motivation instead of a bad one."

Reference:

1. <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors>
2. <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2011/11/10/chinese-students>
3. http://www.washcouncil.org/documents/pdf/WIEC2011_Fraud-in-China.pdf
4. <http://www.guotuzi.cn/html/20110923/n-57396.html>
5. <http://sc.sina.com.cn/edu/study/snews/2012-02-16/092718678.html>
6. <http://edu.sina.com.cn/gaokao/2011-06-03/1114298442.shtml>
7. <http://the-diplomat.com/china-power/2010/10/16/cheating-in-china/>
8. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/07/world/asia/07fraud.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all
9. <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-02-12/north-dakota-school-awarded-unearned-degrees-state-says.html>
10. Wei Gao, teacher at Chengdu New Oriental School, e-mail: chengdu-tousu@xdf.cn, phone: 028-8555-2266.
11. Xueqin Jiang, director of international department, Peking University High School, columnist in The Chronicle of Higher Education. E-mail: jiangxueqin@pkuschool.edu.cn, phone: 010-5875-1183.
12. Tianyang Li, senior in Chongqing Nankai High School, e-mail: 472415181@qq.com, phone: 023-6510-2862.
13. Huaiyin Li, associate professor, department of history, University of Texas - Austin, e-mail: hli@mail.utexas.edu, phone: (512) 475-7910.
14. Di Luo, senior in Sichuan University, e-mail: 05523750@qq.com, phone: +86-15390057996.

15. Wenrui Shuai, Chinese applicant, e-mail: shuaiwr@gmail.com, phone:
+86-18717970217.
16. Jianxiong Sun (use name Andy in the news), graduate student at Arizona State
University, e-mail: andy-sjx@gmail.com, phone: (575) 621-9328.
17. Lihua Zhang, English teacher in Chongqing Nankai High School, e-mail:
huaer1015@yahoo.com, phone: +86-13372656868.